

Ministry of Agriculture and Food
BRIEFING NOTE FOR DEPUTY MINISTER FOR INFORMATION FOR MEETING MLA RUSTAD

Ref: 200403

Date: May 24, 2023

Title: Ministry's Response to MLA Rustad Estimates Discussion Questions

Issue: MLA Rustad Estimates Discussion required Ministry responses on the following topics:

- Nitrogen Based Fertilizer
- Year End \$200K Food Security Investment
- B.C. Competitiveness in International Markets
- Insect Protein as a Food Source

Nitrogen Based Fertilizer:

- MLA Rustad made an inaccurate statement during Estimates that should be clarified and will likely increase his understanding of the issue. MLA Rustad indicated that

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- In 2020, the Canadian agriculture sector accounted for 75 percent of national N₂O emissions. Since 2005, nitrogen fertilizer use has increased by 89 percent and N₂O emissions from nitrogen fertilizer use have increased by 92 percent.
- In December 2020, the Government of Canada announced its Strengthened Climate Plan which includes a national target to reduce absolute levels of nitrogen emissions arising from fertilizer application by 30 percent below 2020 levels by 2030.
- Based on shipment data provided by Statistics Canada, almost 29,000 tonnes of N-equivalent fertilizer were shipped to B.C. between June 2021 and July 2022; this is about 1.1 percent of the volume for Canada, and in comparison, about 2.8 percent and 4.1 percent of the shipments to Saskatchewan and Alberta, respectively.
 - Contact: Dieter Geesing, Provincial Soil Specialist, dieter.geesing@gov.bc.ca, 778-666-0531

Response:

- The reduction goal announced by the federal government is currently voluntary and focuses on absolute emissions but is not tied to a decrease in fertilizer use. Reductions are sought through improved fertilizer use efficiency and beneficial management practices.

1)

Response:

- Statistics Canada fertilizer shipment data indicate that, in the period from July 2021 to June 2022, the estimated use of nitrogen fertilizer in B.C. is small compared to other provinces. It amounted to about 29,000 tonnes of N-equivalent fertilizer or less than 1.2 percent of the total shipment of N-fertilizer for Canada.

2)

Response:

- The Ministry did not provide written comments on achieving Canada's fertilizer emission target during the consultation periods in 2022, but have worked across our federal-provincial-territorial tables to ensure that our provincial and federal counterparts are aware that the opportunities to reduce nitrogen fertilizer use are limited in B.C. compared to other provinces:
 - More than 80 percent of B.C.'s agriculture land is pasture or used for hay crops with little or no nitrogen fertilizer input and reliance on manure as N-source.
 - B.C.'s many small farms already predominately use organic nitrogen sources (compost, animal manure).
 - An already high adoption rate of efficient nutrient management practices in greenhouses and specialty crop production (precision agriculture, optimized and monitor synthetic nitrogen).

3)

Response:

- The reduction goal announced by the federal government is currently voluntary and focuses on absolute emissions but is not tied to a decrease in fertilizer use. Reductions are sought through improved fertilizer use efficiency and beneficial management practices. Ministry staff believes that lower nitrogen demand as the result of a decrease in unproductive losses is expected to enhance food security rather than negatively affecting food production. The Ministry has, therefore, not conducted a detailed analysis of the effects of the federal policy on B.C. food production.

- The main focus of the Ministry to support the achievement of further emission reductions are:
 - 1) Research and tool development. Examples: A Nutrient Management Calculator and BC Application Risk Management (ARM) Tool for B.C. growers;
 - 2) Extension support such as the Ministry's Nutrient Management Program training course to increase the number of Nutrient Management Program planners and direct extension activities with producers;
 - 3) Cost-sharing incentives for beneficial management practices through on-farm funding programs such as the BC Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) and Beneficial Management Practices (BMP)

Year End \$200K Food Security Investment:

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Response:

- We expect that our investment of \$166.5 million through year-end supplemental estimates will have measurably positive impacts to the food security of British Columbians. Each program launched with year-end funds has a robust set of measures to enable the Ministry to track and report on our progress.
- For the federal cost-shared funding agreement SCAP, we are collecting information on all projects being funded and will be working with the federal government to assess the short and long-term outcomes that can be attributed to the projects. This includes measuring the level of adoption of tools, techniques and technologies that support increased production. This also includes assessing the long-term impacts of funding programs on revenues in the agriculture sector, which reflect production levels.
- With respect to the impact of the federal policies on reducing emission from nitrogen fertilizer use, as noted above, this is not expected to have any impact on food production levels, and therefore no analysis was required.
 - Contact: Jessica Schafer, Director, Sector Insights and Corporate Initiatives, 236-478-3208

B.C. Competitiveness in International Markets:

5) *What is this ministry doing in terms of trying to make sure that our industry, our agriculture sector, can remain as competitive as possible. In particular, I'm thinking about the fruit growers, the berry growers, and the challenges that they're facing on a global market, because obviously a significant amount of their production has to go to an export market. Our competitiveness and our competitive challenge... We're becoming less and less competitive, I should say, with the policies that are being implemented. What steps has the ministry taken to be able to improve competitiveness for these markets"?*

Response:

- The Ministry is focused and prioritizing increasing exports and creating market diversification opportunities for our agriculture, food, beverage, and seafood businesses. Leveraging our competitive advantages is how we do this. B.C. products have a reputation as high quality, safe, and sustainable, which allows us to be competitive in premium markets and receive fair value.
- A good example of Ministry efforts is our collaboration with the tree fruit sector, which is a key contributor to our economy that generates export revenues and offers jobs across the province. To support domestic and international market development for the sector, the Ministry undertook an in-depth research project that identified targeted markets for B.C. apples. The findings were identified by the sector as highly valuable intelligence and will be integrated into a broader sector strategy to bolster our competitive advantages in key markets with high potential for B.C.
- The B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Food (AF) plays an important role in helping B.C. agriculture, food, beverage, and seafood businesses access markets by leveraging our competitive advantages identified by market and commodity research, business intelligence, and sector partners. AF offers a suite of programming and supports for B.C. businesses looking to export or diversify markets.
- AF provides approximately \$450k per year in Sustainable Canadian Agriculture Partnership (SCAP) funding to the Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development, and Innovation (JEDI) through an MOU established in 2016. The MOU outlines in-market activities, led by JEDI, for B.C.'s agriculture and food sector attendance at key tradeshow in Europe, Asia, and the U.S.
- Increasing exports and creating trade diversification opportunities is a priority for government and AF is focused on addressing these priorities through our programming, initiatives, and partnerships with JEDI, Global Affairs Canada, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.
 - Contact: Mica Munro, Director, Market Development and Trade, 250-883-1469

Insect Protein as a Food Source:

- 6) *We're seeing now that there is potential for insect protein additive to be put into our food supply as a supplement, as an additive to products. What measures is B.C. taking to protect consumers in this province and to warn consumers in this province of any products that may contain this protein that's coming from the production of insects?*

Is this something that British Columbia has the ability to, or would be considering, licensing within British Columbia as an agricultural product?"

Response:

- Many food products that contain insects are available in British Columbia and have been for many years; but the mass production of insect products for human consumption is a new and novel area of agriculture in Canada, with one plant in Ontario producing this product.
- There are no plants in B.C. licensed for or producing this kind of product for consumption, and there are currently no applications to develop a plant for this purpose in the province.
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is responsible for the regulation of food safety in products sold interprovincially in Canada, and the regulation production of insect protein products meant for consumption in multiple provinces is under its jurisdiction.
- Currently, there is no provincial role in the regulation of these products.
- The CFIA is addressing the regulation of insect products for food safety at this time, and B.C. is monitoring the status and development of this industry.
- As the industry develops, we are prepared to increase our involvement if necessary to continue to serve British Columbians.
- The CFIA is responsible for the regulation of labelling of food products. CFIA would determine the criteria necessary for the labelling of insect food products.
- The processing of food products produced in B.C. intended for sale in B.C. is regulated by health authorities. The Ministry of Health would have to confirm if any new policy is required for insects as a food product.
- A decision about licensing this form of agricultural production would require extensive policy review of environmental, and public and animal health issues with federal, provincial, and local government agencies, and other stakeholders.
 - Contact: Gavin Last, Executive Director, Food Safety and Inspection Branch, 778-974-3819

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